THE IMPORTANCE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS IN MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract : There is an issue which can be the subject of a further research that is: most learners of EFL do not actually have any needs at all. They are learning English because they have to rather than because they want or need to. This is particularly true of young learners, who are not going to need to communicate in English for many years to come (if at all). In such cases, the teacher is unlikely to be able to create much intrinsic motivation to learn English in general but can create the need in an engaging classroom task in which the students need to find a way of communicating in English in order to successfully complete the task. This can lead to readiness for acquisition provided the students are motivated by the teacher to read extensively as well. Thus, there should be more place for needs analysis because when we do not run the first principle to create and produce better materials, the rest will always be under great doubt. Every new teacher should consider starting their year applying needs analysis in small scales and then decide what the best is for themselves and their learners.

Keywords : Needs analysis, material development

INTRODUCTION

Needs analysis (also called needs assessment) refers to activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for the developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of particular groups of students.

Needs Analysis is one of the crucial of ELT and ESL. If we fail to gather the needs of teachers, students, parents, and administrators, we can never produce the right material, which has the desired impact on language learners.

There is a big gap between the current material and the real need of partners. In fact, the two partners (teachers and learners) to some extent are aware of their needs. Teachers nearly in every lesson need analysis to guide them with the material and they can see the effect of the material, sometimes right after the lesson sometimes in long term. While for students can sometimes observe or sometimes feel if the lesson plan and the material facilitate their learning. They usually evaluate it with their feelings or sometimes when they try to communicate.

There are some basic ways of doing needs analysis in a principled way. In this review, we discuss the reason why needs analysis is one of the musts and how we can do it.

METHODS

In recent years, the use of technology and social networking has created a wider new generation market, which targets its continuation on the individual needs of people from every age group, occupation, race, and continent. It is the same case for materials development and English language teaching and learning. The more publishers do deeper market researches which they usually call 'needs analysis', the more they feel the need to respond to the needs of partner groups in language teaching, which are, in general, school administrators, parents, teachers, and learners.

Every group has different need to be responds to. For example, school administrators are more interested in results in excel forms which show the frequency of success, which, in fact, indirectly shapes the focus of teachers in the

classroom and makes them more result-oriented instructors.

For parents, every parent has different expectation, it depending on their level of education and experience of learning English. Some concern about to what extent their children communicate effectively in foreign language and others about the scores that their children obtain in their academic life.

While for teachers, they often need more powerful material, which are designed on second language acquisition and learning principles to match the basic learning needs and profiles of learners in different countries, cultures, attitudes, learning habits and styles.

And the last for learners, they need the best curriculum, syllabus design, approach and the best material. The material should value their engagement, linguistic needs, motivation that matches their attitudes, aptitude, learning styles, learning strategies, learners' expectations, age, culture, and local needs.

Many publishers claim that their material are designed to satisfy learners need and teachers need, we must require more professional, more valid and more reliable needs analysis for better materials responding to the needs of each parties.

In spite of the technological developments, which help interest groups to conduct needs analysis, it is hard to say that there is an increased interest in the analysis of learners' needs at the heart of the current learner centered and communicative approaches. There are usually rare attempts made to discover learners' and teachers' real needs. According to Seedhouse (1995) stated that one important reason is the typical problem, which has been going on for a long time, is that needs analysis tends to be associated with ESP and is disregarded in the general English classroom.

Learners as the main sources in needs analysis is very often find it difficult to define what language they needs have. However just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without a through needs analysis (Long, 2005).

The younger the learners groups are the more difficult to identify the learners' needs. Therefore, the teacher or even institution must be cognizant of their impulsion on successful teaching by leading needs analysis through some procedures.

Kaur (2007) describes needs analysis helps teachers to select appropriate tasks and content and teachers' statements of goals and to provide a better understanding of the purpose of instruction for the learners. Most studies simply indicate that needs analysis is of utmost importance in foreign/second language learning achievement (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002; Brindley, 1984; Cameron, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Watanabe & Mochizuki, 2005; Xenodohidis, 2002).

Tomlinson referring to Prowse reports: responses of "ELT materials writers from all over the world 'who' met in Oxford April 1994 for a British Council Specialist Course with UK-based writers and publishers" (Prowse, p. 130). When asked to say how they wrote their materials, many of them focused on the creative process of writing (e.g., "writing is fun, because it's creative; writing can be frustrating, when ideas don't come";) writing is absorbing – the best materials are written in "trances" (Prowse, p. 136) and Prowse concludes that "most of the writers quoted here appear to rely heavily on their intuitions, viewing textbook writing in the same way as writing fiction, while at the same time emphasizing the constrains of the syllabus. The unstated assumption is that the syllabus precedes the creation" (p. 137). Most of the writers focus on what starts and keeps them writing and they say such things as "writing brings joy when inspiration comes, when your hand cannot keep up with the speed of your thoughts" (p. 136). (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 117).

Since then, there have been changes the way course book writers treat materials writing. Either they have started visiting countries by themselves or publishers have sent their area or local representatives to the schools to gather information about their course book to see if they have miscounted anything, which is considered as needs analysis.

In broad sense, many teachers need materials, which provide them everything to minimize teachers' preparation and to spend less time to check their exams. Current course books are like a Swiss knife to avoid needing anything else except that toolkit. Actually, very rare number of teachers can effectively use the tools they are given because there are sometimes too many teachers' materials, which distract them, and they naturally become blind of their needs and their learners' real needs or they fail to use them effectively due to inefficiency of time. For example with the latest technology of active

board (smart board), teachers can access everything with one click. Everything is packed in one piece of software; it usually has the student's book, workbook, videos, exams, games, useful web links, and even teaching tips.

DISCUSSION

Today teachers do not have to worry much to pre-read the text or complete the tasks before the lesson as high technology provides them the answers with one click. They are also given test bank which digitally guess how and about what learners are needed to be tested. In short, teachers do not have to worry much on what and how they teach in the classroom but rather follow what the invisible author of the course book who targets a standard profile of learners in every classroom in anywhere in the world. However, this situation may bring some important consequences like skipping the real needs of learners and teachers in the classroom.

In today's world, a good material has a vital and indispensable role in EFL. Sometimes it is hard to decide which one is more important 'learners, a teacher or a material' as the answer is based on many variables. Sometimes a teacher who is aware of his/her learners' objective needs such as teaching/learning approach or subjective needs including learners' motivation, personal learning preferences/styles and language needs/wants can be extremely successful.

Identifying learning styles enables a teacher to capitalize on a learner's strengths and to become familiar with concepts they may find challenging (Green, 1999). On the other hand, intrinsically motivated students can go on learning a foreign language under any circumstances or a good material may lead the teacher and help the learner to acquire the language.

The main purpose of the needs analysis should be to match the beliefs, expectations and perceptions of teachers/ administrators/ curriculums with the needs of learners. A good material is the contact place of every partner and must firstly be based on needs analysis and following steps. As it is true to say that regrettably little of extensive literature studies on research and materials development provides empirical evidence of the effects of materials on their users. Needs analysis may greatly help writers to have an outline of principled approaches to developing ELT materials.

To have a principled route map for doing needs analysis Masuhara (1998) discusses this issue as:

Whose needs analysis? How are 'needs' defined in the literature? They seem to be defined in terms of: (a) ownership (whose needs are they?) (b) kinds (what kinds of needs are identified) (c) sources (what are the sources for the need?)

She draws a table in which she lists the needs identified in needs analysis literature to be expanded.

Table 1. Needs classification (Masuhara, 1998, pp. 240–241)

LEARNERS' NEEDS	Personal needs	age; sex; cultural background interests; educational background
	Learning needs	learning styles previous language learning experiences; gap between the target level and the present level of proficiency in various competence areas (e.g., Skills strategies); learning goals and expectations for a course
	Future professional needs	requirements for the future undertakings in terms of: knowledge of language knowledge of language use L2 competence
TEACHERS' NEEDS	Personal needs	age; sex; cultural background interests; educational background teachers' language proficiency
	Professional needs	preferred teaching styles teacher training experience teaching experience
ADMINISTRATORS' NEEDS	Institutional needs	socio-political needs, market forces educational policy; constraints (e.g., time, budget, resources)

Even though Mashuara refers to the needs of teachers, the way she differentiated three kinds of needs according to how they are identified might be applicable for every partner group (learners, teachers, and administrators).

Self-perceived needs – the needs that are reported by the partner groups. These are what partners groups themselves can articulate. Needs perceived by others – the needs of the partner groups which they are not aware of and thus cannot articulate themselves and which are identified by others (e.g., colleagues, teacher-trainers, researchers, parents, learners) in response to qualitative data (e.g., observation of the teacher's teaching, learners learning styles, analysing the tendency in interview and questionnaire responses of the teacher). Objectively measured needs – the needs which

are identified in objective studies in which quantified data is collected, analysed and interpreted by a third party who tries to be detached, unbiased and accurate (Mashuara, 1998).

Referring to Nation and Macalister (2010) we can easily claim that the outcomes of needs analysis must be useful for curriculum design and materials development or institutional development. It is not worth gathering needs analysis information if no application can be found for it.

Information about objective needs can be gathered by questionnaires, personal interviews, data collection (for example, gathering exam papers or text books and analysing them), observation (for example, following a learner through a typical day), informal consultation with

teachers and learners, and tests. Subjective needs are discovered through learner self-assessment using lists and scales, and questionnaires and interviews (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

In relation with their (Nation & Macalister, 2010) simple classification of needs under three main titles, which are lacks, wants and necessities, they draw a table, which simplifies the methods and examples of needs analysis.

Table 2. Methods and examples of needs analysis
(Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 27)

Type of need	Focus	Method	Example
Necessities	Proficiency	Self-report	Level of vocabulary knowledge (Nation & Beglar, 2007)
		Proficiency Testing	Level of fluency e.g. reading speed
	Situations of use	Self-report	Analysis of texts (Nations, 2006)
		Observation and analysis	Analysis of exams and assignments (Frienderichs & Pierson, 1981; Horowitz, 1986)
		Review of Previous research	Analysis of tasks (Brown et al., 1984)
		Corpus analysis	MICASE (http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micase)
Lacks	Proficiency	Self-report Testing	Vocabulary tests
	Situations of use	Self-report	Examiners' reports
		Observation and analysis	Analysis of tasks (Ellis, 1986)
Wants	Wishes	Self-report	
	Use	Observation	Records of choices of activities
			Teachers' observation

There is a diverse way of evaluation that might be essential. The perspectives can differentiate depending on the type of need and the way the data were gathered. Data gathering leads to a better evaluation of needs analysis.

Reliable needs analysis is more than people observing or interpreting performing tasks or getting statistics about a questionnaire. It is better to systematise the observation by using pre-set checklist, or by recording and applying standardized analysis procedures. Valid needs analysis contains checking what is relevant and important. The kind of need which is evaluated and the kind of data which are being collected have a vital importance. Only to choose the easiest or the most practical way might bring its risks with it.

The cooperation of partner groups, learners, teachers, administrators, and publishers in harmony may reduce the possible tension between reliable and valid needs analysis. A compromise is necessary but validity should always be given priority. While interpreting the results of analysis, it is beneficial to be critical to be able to handle it from various angles.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that publishers and teachers may ignore the importance of needs analysis due to several important reasons. Teachers, when being interviewed by publishers or officials (or even when responding to their questionnaires) are more likely to be polite and/or cautious and inclined more towards being more optimistic in their responses.

The next thing we should consider is the efficiency of the materials on users.

Unfortunately, because of its cost and long investigation, publishers usually avoid evaluating to what extent the material has an impact on EFL learning. To be able to see the real picture behind the colourful pages of current materials, we should design micro-evaluation which needs to be a more teacher oriented approach since teachers are more likely to be focused on the day to day concerns of the activities and techniques which are successful or not in the classroom.

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